

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

Draft Environmental Assessment

Contract between the United States and the Pine River Irrigation District for the Use of Project Water for Miscellaneous Purposes



**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Western Colorado Area Office**

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CONTRACT BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES
AND THE PINE RIVER IRRIGATION DISTRICT
FOR THE USE OF PROJECT WATER FOR
MISCELLANEOUS PURPOSES

Summary of Environmental Assessment

The environmental assessment evaluates a proposal to execute a contract allowing use of a limited amount of irrigation water from the Pine River Project for other purposes, primarily drinking water supplies, in order to meet the needs of a growing population in portions of La Plata and Archuleta Counties in southwest Colorado.

Vallecito Reservoir of the Pine River Project regulates and stores flows of the Pine River for irrigation and flood control purposes. The project was constructed by the Bureau of Reclamation and is operated by the Pine River Irrigation District. Approximately 55,000 acres of Southern Ute Indian Tribe and private land receive irrigation water from the project. The project service area is experiencing increased residential growth and this trend is expected to continue. Domestic water supplies in the area include individual wells and, in developed areas such as the town of Bayfield, treatment and distribution systems. There are both quality and quantity problems with the existing domestic supplies.

The proposed alternative in the environmental assessment provides a contract between Reclamation and the Pine River Irrigation District to allow conversion of a limited amount of irrigation water to other uses, primarily domestic uses. This conversion is seen as the most practical method of meeting existing and future domestic water supply needs. The impact analysis shows that with the conversion, existing irrigation supplies would be protected and minor changes in streamflows and reservoir content would result. The present trend of residential growth and smaller agricultural tracts is expected to continue. Resources such as fish and wildlife, endangered species, wetlands, recreation, cultural resources, and Indian Trust Assets are not expected to be significantly affected.

Public scoping meetings and public contract negotiations were held during preparation of the draft environmental assessment. Following public review of the draft, a final environmental assessment will be prepared.